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SUBJECT: NORTHERN UGANDA NOTES (MARCH 1-31, 2009)

REF: A. KAMPALA 241 B. KAMPLA 281

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¶1. Summary: The following Northern Uganda Notes provide information on the situation on the ground and USG activities aimed at meeting Mission objectives in northern Uganda. These objectives include promoting regional stability through peace and security, good governance, access to social services, economic growth, and humanitarian assistance. Post appreciates feedback from consumers on the utility of this product and any gaps in information that need to be filled. End Summary.

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION PROCESSES

¶2. (SBU) On March 4, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and Congolese President Joseph Kabila met on the Uganda-Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) border to discuss bilateral political, economic, and military issues (Ref A). The two presidents also discussed the continuation of joint military operations against the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Ugandan officials told the media and diplomatic corps in a briefing on March 24 that Operation Lightning Thunder (OLT) had moved from Phase I to Phase II. The Ugandan Peoples Defense Forces (UPDF) handed over its headquarters and command of the operation to the Congolese military on March 15. The two presidents agreed to continue the operation under Congolese command, with Ugandan intelligence and reconnaissance assistance and UN Mission in Congo (MONUC) support.

¶3. (U) Ugandan Foreign Minister Sam Kutesa told Kampala-based diplomats on March 24 that there will be no new talks with the LRA and that Kony must sign the already negotiated Final Peace Agreement (FPA). UPDF's Chief of Defense Forces, General Aronda, reported that OLT had succeeded in consolidating regional unity and that Kony is not safe in the region. Aronda reported that the assault against Kony had resulted in the death of 98 LRA rebels up to that point. The rebels had killed 12 UPDF soldiers and wounded 19 others. The army rescued a total of 380 captives.

¶4. (SBU) UN Special Envoy for LRA-Affected Areas Joachim Chissano briefed donors on March 16 after he met with President Museveni in Kampala (Ref B). Chissano said that he maintained contact with LRA spokesman David Matsanga. Kony reportedly wants a cease-fire, a military force consisting of 200 soldiers from South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique to protect his assembly at Rikwangba, and a stakeholders' conference. Chissano insists that Kony should call him (Chissano) directly and maintain regular contact if he wants to be taken seriously. To date, Kony has not called Chissano.

¶5. (SBU) USG Activities: Northern Uganda Transition Initiative

(NUTI) provided support for the latest Invisible Children community advocacy campaign entitled "Rescue Our Children." The first events kicked off in Gulu March 27 and 28 and were attended by thousands of northern Ugandans. P/E Chief and Northern Uganda Advisor represented the U.S. Mission at various activities including a peace march, symbolic destruction of displaced persons huts to celebrate the return home, along with traditional songs and dances. Some 10,000 Gulu residents and guests from other districts watched Invisible Children's latest documentary, "The Rescue of Joseph Kony's Child Soldiers," which details various failed peace processes and the failure of Kony to sign the FPA. It also highlights the continued abduction of children in DRC, Sudan, and Central African Republic. Invisible Children will hold a worldwide campaign day on April 25 in Washington, D.C., Mexico City, London, Paris, and Sydney to push for the release of the remaining LRA abductees.

¶6. (SBU) The development of Uganda's legal framework to try war crimes is in its final stages. The USAID-funded Public International Law Group (PILPG) has been working with the Ministry of Justice and parliamentarians to finalize the International War Crimes Bill, which will criminalize war crimes and domesticate the International Criminal Court statute. Progress continues on formalizing traditional forms of justice and establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

¶7. (U) On March 19, Ambassador Browning presented Sister Veronica Oyela with a "Woman of Courage Award" certificate for her contributions to the promotion of the prosperity of women, including child mothers returning from the conflict in northern Uganda; especially survivors of the LRA insurgency.

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SECURITY UPDATE
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¶8. (U) On March 3, the Ugandan military forces killed one LRA fighter and captured Colonel Thomas Kwoyelo during an ambush at Ukwa in DRC. Kwoyelo, who was injured during the fire exchange, was treated and repatriated to Uganda on March 5. Kwoyelo is a senior LRA commander and he is alleged to have killed 11 Ugandan students on March 28, 2001. On March 5, the joint military forces captured five LRA rebels and rescued two Ugandan women. On March 9, the joint military forces killed another senior LRA Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Okello Yape, and captured 16 fighters south west of Ri-Kwangba, near the DRC border and southern Sudan.

¶9. (U) On March 9, the allied military forces rescued Catherine Ajok, a former student of St. Mary's Aboke Secondary School and 18 Congolese captives. On March 12 Ajok returned home along with her one year old baby after 13 years in LRA captivity. Ajok and her parents met President Museveni on March 14. Ajok was abducted along with over 100 other girls in October 1996. She was one of thirty that were not released after initial pleas from local residents. The fate of one "Aboke girl," Miriam Akello, remains unknown.

¶10. (U) An additional 3,000 Congolese soldiers and over 100 UN peacekeepers will be deployed in the Garamba National Park to pursue the LRA rebels. UPDF spokesperson, Major Felix Kulayigye said the troops will fill the gap left after Ugandan troops withdrew on March 15.

¶11. (U) Caritas Uganda, a Catholic charity organization, has again denied involvement in the supply of equipment to the LRA rebels. The organization was responding to media reports, where it was listed among organizations accused of supplying communication equipment to the LRA.

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HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY
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¶12. (U) On March 13, the Prime Minister of Uganda, Apollo Nsibambi, announced that the Government had secured \$243 million to kick start reconstruction programs for the rehabilitation of northern Uganda.

While chairing a consultative meeting attended by donors and legislators from the north, Nsibambi said the funds will finance the first year of the Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan (PRDP), which will be implemented beginning in July. Meanwhile, northern parliamentarians threatened to petition court to stop the government from including eastern districts in the PRDP. The legislators argue that PRDP should cater only to the 29 districts that were affected by the LRA insurgency, and not to the 40 proposed by the government.

¶13. (U) The latest Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) return figures from UN Office for the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) for LRA-affected districts remain strong. Amuru District remains the weakest in terms of return figures. Most experts agree this is due to the poor level of health and education services available at the sub-county and parish levels in the newly-created rural district. Local and national government officials, who consult regularly with USAID in Gulu, also believe that provision of services "closer to home" is a key to ensuring continued returns in the region. Many families in Acholiland have their feet in three places: a hut in the original (mother) camp, some form of shelter or hut in transit sites (satellite camps), and a shelter in their village of origin where they are working the land. This was confirmed during a recent site visit by a Food for Peace team that saw people building at home, but clearly still living in the transit camp eight kilometers away. The story is different in other LRA-affected areas, including Lango and Pader Districts, where the returns are complete and camps have been dismantled. There, it is clear that formerly displaced persons have settled permanently in their home areas.

¶14. (SBU) USG Activities: USAID's health and education programs staff based in Kampala traveled to the north on March 23 for a week-long review of programming and field visits. A combination of 50 USAID and implementing partner staff members separated into seven groups to conduct field visits in the following districts: Gulu, Amuru, Kitgum, Pader, Lira, Oyam, and Dokolo. Common findings from the field visits included: a need for small infrastructure development across the districts and an agreement that the north lagged behind other parts of Uganda in terms of social infrastructure including schools, clinics, sanitary facilities at both schools and clinics, and water points; lack of comprehensive understanding among district leadership about USAID programs; the need for USAID to align programs with district development plans;

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weak civil society development and community capacity to advocate for their needs or link to government; and clear need for USAID to have greater outreach to district governments and communities to enhance programming.

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FROM THE MEDIA AND THE WEB
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¶15. (U) Media reports in March 2009, tackled a range of issues including the government troop withdrawal from the DRC after a three-month onslaught and the release of funds for the PRDP.

¶16. (U) "Lightning Thunder A Great Milestone" (The New Vision, March 17). This editorial commented that the UPDF had started a week-long withdrawal from the Garamba National Park in the DRC after a three-month onslaught that had sent the LRA rebels into disarray. The article notes that the greatest achievement of the operation was the dismantling of LRA camps and its command structure. The greatest challenge now is not only how to keep Kony away from Uganda's borders, but also how to ensure that he does not have the capacity to wreak havoc on the civilian population wherever he is. Therefore, while the UPDF is withdrawing, they should closely work with Congolese and MONUC forces to ensure that LRA top commanders are held to account.

¶17. (U) "Operation Lightning Thunder Weakened LRA" (Daily Monitor, March 18). A Monitor journalist commented that now that the troops are home, it gives Ugandans the opportunity to reflect on the achievements and challenges of the operation with the benefit of hindsight. The biggest challenge OLT faced was managing public expectations. The public expected the capture or death of Joseph

Kony, but the military public relations machine left the public to feed on the ominous opinions from people who could not articulate issues related to the operation. He noted that there are secondary achievements of a strategic nature that had accrued from the operation such as the meeting of President Museveni and Congo's President Kabila in Kasese. The summit meeting of the top political leadership is a worthy achievement that could be the beginning of a new diplomatic rapprochement.

¶18. (U) "What Is Exciting About 120 Billion Ugandan Shillings For North?" (Daily Monitor, March 15). The editorial proposed that "it appears naive for some of the politicians from northern Uganda to get excited about the government announcement that it plans to release 120 billion Ugandan Shillings (about \$58 million) for the much-touted PRDP for the greater north's 40 districts next financial year. The PRDP project was hijacked and bungled according to those in the know. This poor planning resulted in mainly European Union donors, who should have provided 70 percent of the financing, having second thoughts. The PRDP will get underway next financial year, the President said - and with very little money at that. What will 120 Billion Ugandan Shillings do for the PRDP's 40 districts that have the worst social infrastructure in the country?"

¶19. (U) "North Recovery Program Must Be Well Planned" (New Vision, March 23). The editorial examined an emerging dispute between the Government and the Members of Parliament (MPs), from northern Uganda, over the implementation of the approximately \$533 million PRDP project for the region. The program will cover the northern region and part of the eastern region. However, the MPs from northern Uganda are opposed to the inclusion in the program of the districts from the east. They want the program to concentrate on areas that were directly affected by the Lord's Resistance Army insurgency.

BROWNING